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Why CIA Morale Is Plummeting

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The young man had some time on his hands before going to a new job, so his father suggested that he come work for him for a while.

In private business, it would have been normal enough. But the young man was a Navy lieutenant named Geoffrey W. Turner. His father was an admiral who headed the CIA.

According to a CIA spokesman, young Turner worked "in the national intelligence officers' area" at the agency's headquarters for about four months beginning last May 2. He was being paid by the Navy and is now in California attending a naval intelligence school.

According to sources in the intelligence community, he was installed down the seventh-floor hall from Adm. Stansfield Turner's office. For a while, there was an order from that office that some of the most senior intelligence officers at the CIA would give the son daily briefings, but that was apparently stopped because of muttering about the time it was taking from other work.

CIA OFFICERS mention the son in caustic terms while talking about the way the agency is now being run by Turner. It is one little item on a long list of factors that have hurt morale at Langley.

The latest round of publicity about an agency that has attracted a lot of unwanted notice in recent years has been focused on the firing of senior officers in the clandestine operations branch. This is the branch that, in the language of novels and thriller movies, runs spies.

But the morale problem started long before plans for those dismissals became known last summer and the first group of 212 persons was notified beginning on Halloween.

From a number of past and present members of the intelligence community, including both CIA people and those elsewhere in government who work closely with them,

about damage to American security as a result of the way the agency is being run.

"The CIA is being turned into just another bunch of bureaucrats," says one outside specialist. He fears that the quality of U.S. intelligence will suffer from what he sees as the loss of a special dedication that has marked CIA work.

SOME CIA officials discount this fear. While admitting significant past failures, especially in blind spots created by analyzing available data from preconceived attitudes, they contend that the product supplied by the agency is as good as ever — maybe better, because efforts are being made to improve analytical work.

And it will continue to be good, despite the reduction in clandestine services, they insist. This is, however, a controversial point somewhat separate from the morale problem. It has received little attention.

The deputy director of the CIA for a four-year period ending last spring during which the agency had four directors, Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters, touched on the importance of spies in a speech last month.

Walters estimated that about 50 percent of all intelligence is obtained from such open sources as newspapers and broadcasts, 40 percent from technical systems like reconnaissance satellites, and 10 percent from "human sources." These sources include spies.

The human 10 percent is the most vital part because it alone can reveal intentions, Walters said. Simply knowing how many weapons or other capabilities a potential enemy has is an inadequate guide to making American policy.

WALTERS HAS carefully avoided public criticism of the way the CIA is being run. But others around Washington who specialize in intelligence or who depend heavily upon it for their work are worried that the U.S. ability to penetrate foreign intentions is slipping.

"Intentions are especially important now that Soviet capabilities are so great," says one key Defense Department official dealing with strategic arms problems. "There are worries in the Pentagon as well as out at the CIA over the lack of agent information."

On the other hand, a senior specialist in Soviet affairs elsewhere in the government says the clandestine services never did produce much information on Soviet intentions. The celebrated Penkovsky case was an exception rather than typical, he says.

The CIA's position is that agent work is not being damaged by eliminating some 800 jobs in the clandestine services. Only about 440 of them were filled by people who are being dismissed, contrary to reports that 800 persons are being fired, officials say.

Jobs no longer needed because of the end of the Vietnam war and other changes of intelligence demands are being cut, and older people in a top-heavy organization are being ousted in order to make way for promotions.

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